

Message Text

SECRET

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9790
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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 06225

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: UR, US, XF, PLO
SUBJECT: READOUT ON PRESIDENT CARTER'S TALKS WITH BEGIN;
DISCUSSION OF SOUTH LEBANON, SOVIET CONTACTS WITH PLO AND
OTHER ARAB CLIENTS

REF: STATE 077949

1. DURING MY MARCH 29 CALL ON FIRST DEPUTY MINISTER
KORNIYENKO I DREW EXTENSIVELY ON REFTEL FOCUSING ON THE
FOLLOWING TALKING POINTS:

-- THE TALKS WERE THE MOST PROBING AND DETAILED WHICH THE
TWO LEADERS HAVE EVER HAD. THEY FOCUSED ON THE CRITICAL
ISSUES OF WITHDRAWAL AND THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION.
THESE ARE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT ISSUES FOR ISRAEL AND THE
TALKS WERE CORRESPONDINGLY DIFFICULT.

-- A KEY ISSUE WAS THE APPLICABILITY OF ALL THE PRIN-
CIPLES OF RESOLUTION 242 - INCLUDNG THE PRINCIPLE OF
WITHDRAWAL - TO ALL FRONTS. THE PRESIDENT MADE CLEAR
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THAT ACCEPTANCE OF WITHDRAWAL, INCLUDING ON THE WEST
BANK AND GAZA, IS ESSENTIAL TO PROGRESS IN THE PEACE
NEGOTIATIONS. WE POINTED OUT THAT THE BASIC ISSUE IS
WHETHER ISRAEL WILL ULTIMATELY WITHDRAW IN THE CONTEXT
OF PEACE COMMITMENTS, SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS, AND AGREED
BORDERS AND ALLOW THE PALESTINIANS A REAL VOICE IN
DETERMINING THEIR OWN FUTURE.

-- THE PRESIDENT REITERATED THE U.S. POSITION REGARDING ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN, SECRETARY VANCE EMPHASIZED THAT WE WOULD VIEW THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANY NEW SETTLEMENTS WITH THE UTMOST SERIOUSNESS.

-- WE DID NOT WANT THIS MEETING TO BE DIVERTED FROM THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF PEACE AND THEREFORE SOUTHERN LEBANON WAS DISCUSSED ONLY BRIEFLY. THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAD ALREADY AGREED TO COMPLY WITH UN RESOLUTIONS 425 AND 426 AND HAD DECLARED A UNILATERAL CEASEFIRE. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AND FOREIGN MINISTER DAYAN ASSURED US THAT ISRAEL WILL WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON.

-- WE BELIEVE THESE MEETINGS WENT VERY FAR TOWARD GETTING DOWN TO THE REAL ISSUES. WHAT IS NEEDED NOW IS TIME FOR BEGIN AND HIS COLLEAGUES TO RETHINK AMONG THEMSELVES THE DIFFICULT DECISIONS AHEAD. THIS ISRAELI REAPPRAISAL IS VERY IMPORTANT AND WE HOPE THAT ALL CONCERNED WILL AVOID ACTIONS OR STATEMENTS THAT MIGHT HINDER OR DISTRACT FROM THIS PROCESS.

2. THANKING ME FOR THE PRESENTATION, KORNIYENKO SAID IT WAS NOT COMPLETELY CLEAR HOW THINGS HAD CHANGED. FROM THE PUBLIC ISRAELI STATEMENTS MADE AFTER THE VISIT, INCLUDING THEIR INTERPRETATION OF 242, THE SOVIETS SAW
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NO EVIDENCE OF CHANGE. FROM POST-VISIT U.S. STATEMENTS, IT APPEARED THAT THE U.S. HAD NOT PUSHED THE ISRAELIS VERY MUCH. IN THIS CONNECTION, HE DREW ATTENTION TO BEGIN'S DECEMBER REMARK THAT THE U.S. HAD REACTED POSITIVELY TO HIS STATEMENT ON 242 AS APPLIED TO THE WEST BANK. I REITERATED THAT OUR OWN POSITION ON 242 WAS PERFECTLY CLEAR.

3. ON SOUTH LEBANON, KORNIYENKO SAID THAT U.S. STATEMENTS AFTER THE BEGIN VISIT DID NOT SERVE POSITIVE GOALS. SPECIFICALLY U.S.:

-- REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO THE (AL FATAH TERRORIST) "INCIDENT" AND CLAIMED THAT IT HAD LED TO SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS.

-- FAILED TO CONDEMN AND EVEN SEEMED TO JUSTIFY THE ISRAELI INVASION.

SUCH POSITION DID NOT REFLECT THE TRUE SITUATION AND DID NOT SERVE TO INFLUENCE ISRAEL. I SAID OUR POSITION ON THIS WAS ALSO CLEAR AND REFLECTED IN OUR SUPPORT OF RESOLUTIONS 425 AND 426. WE DID NOT CONDEMN THE ISRAELIS BECAUSE THERE WAS A CERTAIN UNDERSTANDABLE

JUSTIFICATION FOR THEIR REACTION. KORNIYENKO SNAPPED THAT NOT MANY WOULD AGREE THAT THERE WAS ANY JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ISRAELIS KILLING "HUNDREDS, EVEN THOUSANDS INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN. NOR WOULD HE ACCEPT THE CHARACTERIZATION "UNDERSTANDABLE."

4. ON THE UN FORCES, KORNIYENKO SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS HAD ABSTAINED ON THE RESOLUTION THEIR VIEW WAS THAT THEIR TASK WAS TO GET THE ISRAELIS OUT. THE

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EXDIS

SOVIETS WERE CONCERNED THAT THE UN FORCES MIGHT NOT BE USED IN A MANNER WHICH WAS RIGHTFUL (PRAVOMERNIY) AND THE FACTS WERE BEGINNING TO PROVE THIS. UN FORCES WERE BEING STATIONED NOT IN POSITIONS OCCUPIED BY THE ISRAELIS BUT IN THOSE INHABITED BY PALESTINIANS. COULD THAT REALLY BE THEIR FUNCTION? MEANWHILE THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL.

5. I SAID THE ISRAELIS HAD MADE CLEAR THEIR INTENT TO WITHDRAW ONCE THE UN FORCES HAD CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. MEANWHILE, HOWEVER, THE PALESTINIANS CONTINUED TO FIRE ON NORTH ISRAELI VILLAGES AND EVEN ON THE UN TROOPS. REFUSING TO ACCEPT THIS, KORNIYENKO INSISTED THAT IT WAS THE ISRAELIS WHO WERE GUILTY AND CHALLENGED ME TO CHECK WITH UN HEADQUARTERS.

6. KORNIYENKO ASKED RHETORICALLY WHETHER THERE WOULD BE A REPEAT OF THE 1967 EXPERIENCE WHERE, PAYING LIP SERVICE TO 242, THE ISRAELIS PROMISED TO WITHDRAW "TOMORROW, TOMORROW" BUT NEVER DID. THE RECENT RESOLU-

TION SHOULD HAVE CALLED FOR "IMMEDIATE" WITHDRAWAL. I SAID THAT, AS KORNIYENKO KNEW, THE TWO SITUATIONS WERE DIFFERENT; UNDER 242 ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL WAS TO BE IN SECRET

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THE CONTEXT OF PEACE SETTLEMENT WHICH STILL EVADED US. RE PRESENT SITUATION, ISRAELIS HAD PLEDGED COMPLIANCE WITH 425 AND 426 AND THERE WERE ENCOURAGING SIGNS THAT ISRAELIS WOULD WITHDRAW WHEN UN FORCE IN PLACE. BUT KORNIYENKO ONLY SAID, "WE'LL SEE. WE SEE NO BASIS FOR A POSITIVE ASSESSMENT."

7. I ASKED WHETHER THE SOVIETS HAD ANY NEW THOUGHTS IN LIGHT OF THE LAST GROMYKO-ARAFAT MEETING WHICH THE WORLD HAD NOTED WAS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED BY THE AL FATAH RAID THAT TRIGGERED THE ISRAELI ACTION. KORNIYENKO SAID HE CATEGORICALLY REJECTED ANY IMPLICATION THAT THE AL FATAH RAID WAS RELATED TO THOSE TALKS. WHEN I SAID I HAD NOT IMPLIED ANYTHING BUT MERELY STATED A FACT, KORNIYENKO SAID, "IT RAINED IN THE CITY OF GORKIY TWO DAYS AFTER THOSE TALKS BUT YOU DIDN'T COMMENT ON THAT." THERE WERE DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE "INCIDENT" AND, AS HE HAD STATED IN ANOTHER CONVERSATION, THE DETAILS WERE OBSCURE BECAUSE OF ISRAELI CENSORSHIP. THE SOVIETS CERTAINLY DID NOT APPROVE, BUT IT WAS "UNDERSTANDABLE" IN THE LIGHT OF BEGIN'S DECLARATION THAT ISRAEL WOULD NEVER QUIT THE WEST BANK WHICH, BEGIN INSISTED, IS LIBERATED INSTEAD OF OCCUPIED. (KOMPLEKTOV INTERJECTED TO NOTE THAT, AFTER ALL, THE PALESTINIANS WERE WAGING ACTIONS WHICH PARALLELED THOSE OF THE ISRAELIS WHEN THEY WERE STRUGGLING TO GAIN A HOMELAND.)

8. STATING THAT THERE COULD BE NO JUSTIFICATION FOR THE AL FATAH RAID, I ASKED KORNIYENKO TWO SPECIFIC QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SOVIET DISCUSSIONS WITH ARAFAT:

-- DID THEY TRY TO PERSUADE HIM NOT TO UNDERTAKE SECRET

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TERRORIST ACTION?

-- DID THEY ASK HIM TO COMPLY WITH PERTINENT UN RESOLUTIONS?

9. IN RESPONSE, KORNIYENKO SAID:

-- SUCH QUESTIONS DID NOT ARISE IN THEIR CONTACTS. THE PALESTINIANS DID NOT SEEK NOR DID THEY NEED SOVIET APPROVAL FOR THEIR ACTIONS.

-- AS BEFORE, THE PALESTINIANS AND OTHER ARABS WANTED A POLITICAL RESOLUTION OF THEIR CONFLICT WITH ISRAEL BUT WITH CONDITIONS WHICH GUARANTEED THEIR LEGITIMATE RIGHTS AS HAD BEEN AGREED IN THE OCTOBER 1 U.S.-SOVIET JOINT STATEMENT. SADAT'S DEPARTURE FROM THOSE PRINCIPLES HAD COMPLICATED THE SITUATION. THE PALESTINIANS AND OTHER ARABS ARE STILL WILLING TO TAKE THE FORMER ROAD, BUT SADAT'S MOVE AND BEGIN'S INTERPRETATION OF 242 TO EXCLUDE WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK CAME AS A BIG BLOW AND NATURALLY THE PALESTINIANS AND OTHER ARABS COULD NOT BE OPTIMISTIC.

10. I RESPONDED THAT WE DISAGREED WITH THE VIEW OF THE SOVIETS AND THEIR ARAB FRIENDS THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY DEVIATION FROM THE U.S.-SOVIET JOINT STATEMENT. WE HAD MADE CLEAR THAT WE DISAGREED WITH THE CURRENT ISRAELI ATTITUDE ON 242. IN THE MEANWHILE IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF THE OTHERS INCLUDING THE SOVIETS WOULD REFRAIN FROM STATEMENTS AND ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT EXACERBATE THE SITUATION. AS FOR SOUTHERN LEBANON, IF BOTH SIDES COOPERATED WITH THE CAPABLE UN FORCE COMMANDER, ULTIMATELY THE SITUATION COULD BE CALMED. FRANKLY,

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AS THE ISRAELIS HAD SAID, MUCH DEPENDS ON HOW THE SITUATION DEVELOPS. THE ISRAELIS UNDERSTANDABLY FEEL THEY

MUST HAVE SOME ASSURANCE THAT THERE WOULD NO LONGER BE
ANY THREAT OF INCURSIONS INTO ISRAELI TERRITORY.

11. KORNIYENKO WONDERED WHETHER MY REFERENCE TO AN
ULTIMATE SOLUTION MEANT FIVE YEARS OR TEN YEARS. WAS IT
REALLY TRUE THAT THERE HAD BEEN GROUND INCURSIONS FROM
SOUTH LEBANON ON ISRAEL AND IF SO THAT THESE HAD NOT
BEEN CONTAINED? THERE HAD BEEN ATTACKS FROM THE SEA,
NOT FROM THE LAND. DID ARTILLERY EXCHANGES CONSTITUTE
LAND INCURSIONS? AFTER ALL, ARTILLERY PIECES COULD
NOT SHOOT AT EACH OTHER FROM FIFTY KILOMETERS. IN ANY
EVENT THE ISRAELIS SHOULD SEEK POLITICAL RATHER THAN
MILITARY SOLUTIONS.

12. COMMENT. CLEARLY NOT A VERY REWARDING DIALOGUE.
END COMMENT. TOON

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